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The Veterinarian as an Information Source for Feedlot Operators

National Animal Health Monitoring System

Feedlot operators rely heavily on key individuals for the information they need to support decisions on animal health management, nutritional management, and general production. **One of the prominent figures recognized as a source of information is the veterinarian.**

The USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) collected management information from feedlots with at least 1,000 head one-time capacity in the 13 primary cattle feeding states¹. Over 85 percent of the January 1, 1994, inventory of cattle on feed for the U.S. were present in these 13 states. Though these large-capacity feedlots represented only 4 percent of all feedlots in these areas, they had 83.3 percent of the 13 states' January 1994 feedlot inventory. In October, November, and December of 1994, 453 feedlot operators provided information on health management practices for NAHMS' Cattle on Feed Evaluation (COFE). Analyses of these data incorporated the selection criteria and, thus, the results pertained to all large (1,000 head or more capacity) feedlots in the 13 states.

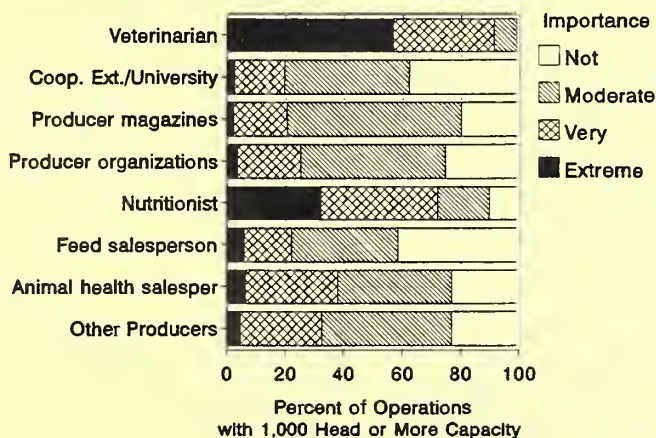
Producers were asked to rate the importance of various sources of information. Figure 1 shows that, in the area of animal health information, the veterinarian was most commonly cited as being very or extremely important (91.4 percent of producers.) Other highly important sources of animal health information were nutritionists (71.9 percent), animal health salespersons (37.8 percent), and other producers (32.3 percent).

Regarding sources of nutritional information, the nutritionist was the most commonly cited source as

being highly important (92.1 percent, Figure 2). Other sources less frequently cited as being highly important were veterinarians (41.2 percent) and feed salespersons (40.6 percent).

Figure 1

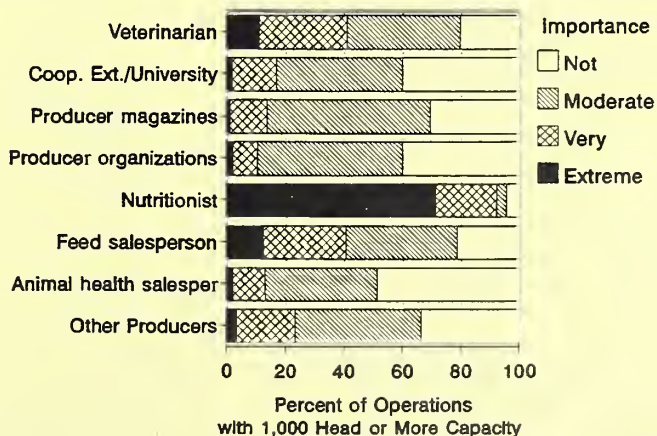
Sources of Animal Health Information



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Figure 2

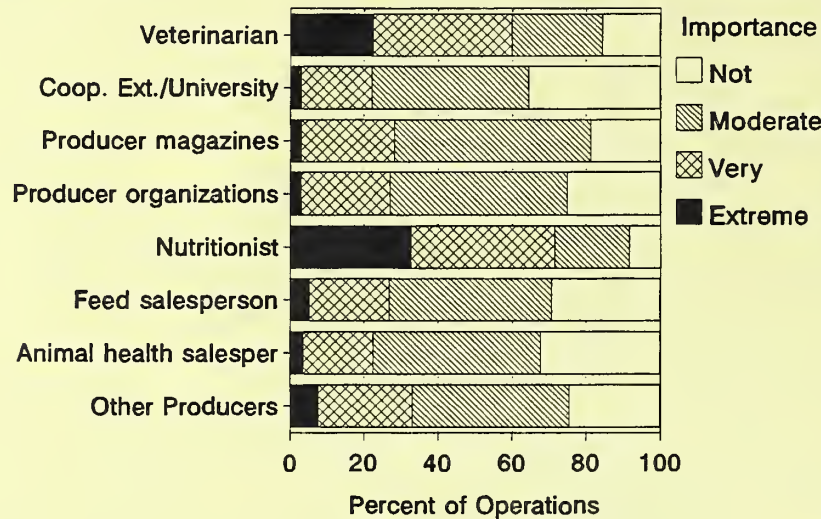
Sources of Nutritional Information



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¹ Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Washington.

Sources of General Production Information



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Figure 3 shows that producers indicated a greater reliance on nutritionists (71.7 percent) as a highly important source of general production information than other sources such as the veterinarian (60.0 percent) and other producers (40.7 percent).

In summary, the veterinarian is a well respected source for animal health information. But, over two-thirds of operators of large feedlots had similar esteem for the nutritionist as a source of animal health information. Producers value veterinarians, but rely on them to a lesser extent for their nutritional information.

Over 20 percent of feedlot operators indicated that the veterinarian is not important as a source of nutrition information. Some would say that the veterinarian should be a more highly regarded source of information in the nutrition area, particularly since animal health and nutrition are integrally related. Perhaps lack of skills (perceived or real) in the area of nutrition is responsible for lack of reliance on the veterinarian for nutritional information.

While the veterinarian is a key player in the operation of large feedlots, opportunities exist for them to expand their influences. They could enhance services to feedlots through development of additional skills in nutrition and general production and by marketing those skills to feedlot operators so

that they are seen as an important source of information in areas other than animal health. In addition, the value placed on nutritionists as a source of information to feedlots underscores the need for veterinarians to develop alliances with these individuals to attain optimal herd health and feedlot profitability.

NAHMS collaborators included the National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA), State and Federal Veterinary Medical Officers, and the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (USDA:APHIS:VS).

Other COFE information is available on the following topics: Branding, Mexican-origin cattle, environmental management, and injection and vaccination practices. Study results on beef cow/calf, dairy cattle, and swine are also available. For more information contact:

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